

CHAPTER**27****Critical Thinking Activity****China, Mongolia, and Taiwan****Ancient China**

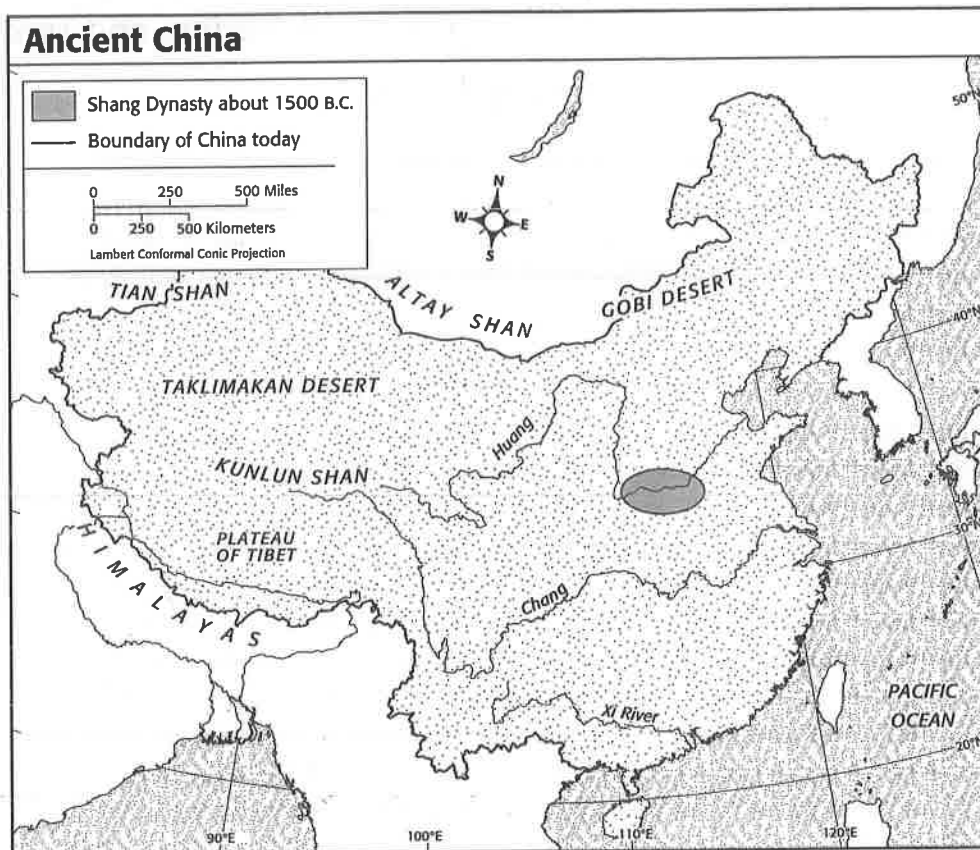
China's geography provides natural barriers against invasions. In western China are the Kunlun, Himalaya, and other rugged mountains. Dry, treeless plains cover a large part of western China. Mountains and tropical jungles separate southern China from Southeast Asia. The huge Gobi Desert, mountain ranges, and plains form China's northern borders. To the east lies the Pacific Ocean.

One important reason why Chinese civilization has lasted is geography. Civilization in China developed in relative isolation from the civilizations of India and the West. The geographic barrier of distance, the towering mountains of central Asia, and formidable deserts aided this isolation. As a result, China developed and retained its own distinctive culture. Although the Chinese did adopt ideas as well as skills from other peoples, they owe less to outside influence than other ancient civilizations. Only the river valleys of China have the rich soil and good climate that people need for farming.

The three great river valleys in China are formed by the Huang River, the Chang River, and the Xi River. It is these three river valleys where most of China's population lives today. The early Chinese first settled along the Huang River—also called the Yellow River—about 5000 B.C. and began to farm. Like the Egyptians along the Nile River, the people in the Huang valley learned how to build dikes to control flooding by the Huang. They also built ditches and canals to irrigate their fields. But the Huang River was not as predictable as the Nile. Some years the Huang did not flood. In other years the river broke through the dikes along its banks and destroyed crops as well as whole villages. For this reason the Chinese called the Huang the River of Sorrows.

From the beginning of its recorded history until the early 1900s China was ruled by a succession of dynasties. China's first dynasty of rulers began in the Huang River valley, where early farming villages were governed by local leaders. After hundreds of years these villages grew into small cities and towns. In about 1500 B.C. the Shang kings set up their government in one of these cities and became China's first dynasty of rulers. At first they ruled only the part of the Huang River valley around the city of Anyang. While most of the Huang valley lands were still controlled by local leaders, these leaders promised to help defend Shang land against nomad invaders. In time of war the Shang king would command all the local armies. After the Shang dynasty declined in power, another dynasty emerged to take its place. This is the manner in which China was ruled until 1912.

Chapter 27, Critical Thinking Activity, continued



1. Ancient China's Shang dynasty was centered along the Huang River valley. What geographic features protected and favored those early Chinese settlements?

2. Why was the Huang or Yellow River called the River of Sorrows? Why do you think people continued to live near this dangerous river?

3. List two geographical features that made travel in ancient China difficult.

4. The ancient Chinese had a strong sense of identity and considered themselves superior to other peoples. What geographic reason could account for this thinking?
